

On October 5, MELTA organized another one-day seminar, this time specially for KBSR teachers. The seminar was very well attended and enthusiastically received.

The early part of the seminar was devoted to a discussion of the aims of KBSR. The language skills involved in KBSR were discussed; first, the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, then the skills that help develop the child's cognitive ability, for instance, matching, sequencing, classifying, grouping, comparing and arranging. Some time was also spent on talking about language forms (that is, language structures) and language functions — the purposes for which people speak and write (for example, to help someone to see our point of view, or seek their advice, or find out information).

The seminar presenters spent a fruitful session talking about the importance of 'meaningful' learning materials at the KBSR level. Throughout the seminar they reiterated the idea of 'understanding', and the fact that pupils learn far more readily if materials tap the knowledge and experience that children have when they are asked to perform a task. They also emphasized the desirability of involving pupils in problem-solving type activities, both for the inherent interest that such activities contain but also because of their potential for multi-level deployment. They demonstrated that such exercises usually have more than one correct answer, or varying degrees of correctness, so that even the weakest child in a class can feel a sense of achievement if he can do at least one part of a question or task. They made the point that teaching language functions rather than language forms is a far more effective way of teaching language, and that taking a skills-based approach rather than a mechanical grammar-based approach is also a more economical way of teaching language. By showing examples of exercises on the overhead projector, the seminar presenters demonstrated convincingly that a lot more language can

be generated if pupils are given task-based, problem-solving type materials. By examining various exercises from KBSR books, they showed how such exercises can cause pupils to question, argue, reason — in fact, work out 'answers' — and in the process both 'think' and 'enjoy'.

The presenters showed various transparencies of exercises which help develop the young child's cognitive skills — skills of classification, ordering, sequencing, deduction, etc. It was clear that many of the participants were enlightened by this approach and appreciated the rationale behind the exercises shown.

The presenters then spent time giving guidelines for preparing (and evaluating) KBSR materials, in particular, workbook activity sheets. Below is a section of a handout on guidelines given out by the presenters:

Guidelines for Constructing Activity Sheets

Try to make sure that as many of the following features as possible are reflected in your activities:

1. The activities should provide opportunities for active use in the language in a variety of contexts. Use — not practice, as in a drill, but actual use to get something done — is what is important. Variety is necessary because:
 - (a) language is 'negotiation of meaning' and meaning is context determined;
 - (b) practice, repetition and reinforcement are crucial to language learning;
 - (c) concepts behind words and structures are more soundly and richly conceived when met in a variety of contexts;
 - (d) children have short attention spans;
 - (e) the more varied the activity and the more varied the media (sight, hearing, touch, etc.), the more securely fixed the word/concept will be in the child's memory.

2. The activities should cater to the current needs of the child and not merely to some deferred future need. Needs here should include life as the curriculum and include the child's social (through the mode of operation, e.g. group work, individual work, etc.), cultural (e.g. through the choice of subject matter), cognitive and psychomotor (e.g. through the kinds of operations a child is expected to do on the given input, e.g. colour, cut and paste, solve a problem) developmental needs.
 3. The activities must be intrinsically enjoyable. Enjoyment increases mind engagement, raises the threshold for learning and helps extend attention span.
 4. The atmosphere for learning created by the activities should be non-threatening.
 5. There must be potential for multi-level development so that every child is able to achieve success although the criteria for success may vary from child to child. If children are immersed in language, they will select whatever is appropriate for them to learn at that level of development.
 6. The activities must be within the ability of every child who is to be given to them. Most of us like doing what we **can** do and do it all the better for liking it.
 7. The activities must take account of the strengths (e.g. their curiosity) and the weaknesses (e.g. their short attention span) of children as learners and people.
 8. The activities, while they must be based on what is familiar to the child, must also extend his experience in some way. There is a reciprocal relationship between language and experience.
 9. The activities must recognize and encourage interlanguage by providing for experimentation with and exploration into language and as a necessary consequence of this, accept constructive error and reward every approximation towards meaning. We do this as a matter of course in L1 learning. Why not in L2?
 10. The activities should not merely teach consumer items (language forms and skills) but should also provide him with opportunities to acquire investment items by giving him opportunities to learn how to learn and by sensitizing him to the learning resources in his own environment, (e.g. through the use of labels, advertising billboards, children's encyclopaedias as teaching inputs).
- The presenters also spent time on discussing potential sources for enrichment activities. Below is a list of some of their ideas:
- Some Potential Sources for Enrichment Activities**
1. *Stories*
 Stories to be told to children;
 Stories for children to participate in;
 Taped dramatized stories for children to listen to while reading;
 Stories to be read to children;
 Stories for children themselves to read.
 2. Dictated experience statements (statements, stories, captions, etc.).
 3. Other kinds of reading material, e.g. 'fun book' kinds of activities, children's encyclopaedias, labels, calendars, jokes, do-it-yourself tricks/drawings/cards, product labels, etc.
 4. Problems to solve from Maths, Science, etc; games, crossword puzzles.
 5. Poems, songs, rhymes.
 6. Role-play situations.
 7. Nature corner, etc., including Maths resource corner recommended by KBSR.
 8. Projects.
- Some practical suggestions were also given for developing worksheets for the KBSR. Preceding this, the presenters talked about the lack of thought that often goes into the preparation of KBSR materials. They talked about how important it is that KBSR materials are systematically planned and how important it is to have

a planning strategy — for example, in the selection of goals, in the developmental sequence and in the involvement of pupils in the learning sequence. The very fact that the KBSR contains a mixture of skills, functions, topics and exercise types in the same syllabus listing means that planning is all the more necessary. Below are some of their suggestions:

Practical Suggestions for Developing Worksheets

1. Use the *Buku Panduan Khas* as a guide for topics, skills, structures and vocabulary.
2. Make a master list of cognitive skill types, for example, matching, classifying. Draw these from the syllabus.
3. Make a list of exercise types, for example:
 - Drawing exercises based on information
 - Fitting a description to a face/situation/setting
 - Putting a story/instructions in the right order
 - Making 'before' and 'after' comparisons
 - Relating speech balloons to situations
 - Filling in the blanks (cloze)
 - Matching signs with places/headlines with text
 - Spotting the difference
 - Matching dialogues to bubbles in picture/cartoon sequences
 - Answering True/False questions on an illustration/map. Justifying why they are true. Rewriting true sentences
 - Reordering messages
4. Make a list of ideas for presenting the new lesson.
5. Make a list of types of reading text which, for example:
 - Make the pupils think and do something
 - Involve the pupils in processing some information
 - Focus on meaning
 - Have a problem-solving element
 - Are based on the child's experience
 - Are interesting and stimulating
6. Think of how you can combine topic, function, form and vocabulary in an exercise and in the unit as a whole so that a skill is taught effectively. In devising workbook

exercises, there is the danger of not paying enough attention to grading within a topic or not linking exercises together. If exercises are effectively linked they set a context and build a sequence of skills.

7. Think of suitable preparatory and extension activities to go in a teacher's guide.

Even though the presenters were aware that not all KBSR teachers are actually involved in the preparation of materials themselves, they thought it important that teachers should know the steps involved in preparing such materials. Most importantly, teachers should be able to evaluate materials for use in their classroom. The following are some of the questions the presenters felt that teachers should ask when evaluating and selecting materials:

Criteria for Selecting Workbooks

1. Are the design and artwork appealing?
2. Are there typographical errors?
3. Is the punctuation correct?
4. Are instructions clearly given?
5. Is there an overall approach?
6. Does the book focus heavily on form at the expense of function/meaning?
7. Is the vocabulary graded according to difficulty?
8. Are concepts correctly handled?
9. Are the exercises contextualized?
10. Are there incorrect language forms?
11. Does the book take a discrete skills approach instead of an integrated skills approach?
12. Is there proper consolidation? Do the writing exercises consolidate the aural/oral and reading exercises?
13. Is there variety of exercise type?
14. Does the book need a communicative approach to language learning?
15. Is there guidance for the teacher?

Although most of the seminar was devoted to discussing the content of KBSR materials, a brief session touched on the design of KBSR materials — the visual presentation of workbook pages. Page layout was discussed and demonstrated — the amount of material on a page and the size and type of illustration and text. The devices that help to steer pupils through workbooks were also discussed —

clearly differentiated headings, clear rubrics, and other symbolic devices. The importance of second colour and the functional value of illustrations were also discussed and demonstrated.

During the last part of the seminar, the participants were put into groups and given a number of published KBSR workbooks. Using the criteria discussed earlier in the day, the participants in each group were asked to evaluate

the materials and select a book or course for use in their school — with reasons, of course. Group leaders then presented their 'selection' to the rest of the participants.

Altogether, the seminar was a very worthwhile learning experience for the participants, and the MELTA organizing committee are very grateful to the two presenters for giving of their time and talent.



INTERESTED IN FURTHERING YOUR STUDIES?

If you are interested in obtaining a degree in teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) then you might be interested in the Bachelor of Education in the Teaching of English as a Second Language — B. Ed. (TESL) at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia.

The B. Ed. (TESL) is a four-year programme (8 semesters) for direct-entry students with the HSC/STP qualifications. Candidates who hold Teachers' Certificates and Diplomas/Certificates in TESL/TEFL will be exempted from certain courses. The programme comprises the following courses:

	Credit	%
1. Basic Course (Humanities)	12	9
2. Technical Course (TESL and Literature)	69	51
3. Professional courses (Education)	32	24
4. Minor Courses	22	16
	<hr/> 135	<hr/> 100%

College trained teachers are encouraged to apply for this course for they will be given special consideration if they have three years teaching experience or have completed a course in TESL/TEFL from a recognized institution.

The basic educational requirements are:

- (i) credit passes in Bahasa Malaysia and English at the SPM/MCE or at a similar level;
- (ii) a pass in GP (English) or a Principal level pass in English or proof that he/she has attained a satisfactory level of English proficiency.
- (iii) strong credits in other papers at MCE/SPM level.

Further information on the programme is available from:

The Dean,
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Universiti Pertanian Malaysia
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